

# SUGAR - SIDE 1

12

TINY BEAUTIFUL THINGS

## Like An Iron Bell

**LETTER WRITER #3 & SUGAR.** Dear Sugar,  
**LETTER WRITER #3.** My question is about love.

(**SUGAR** *now sees* **LETTER WRITER #3.**)

I'm at the age when most of my friends are married. The closest I've been to the altar was when I was the best man. I've had three relationships. One casual, one serious and one current. There was no issue with the casual one: I was up front about not wanting to settle down. The second one started out casual and I broke it off when she got serious, so I lost both a lover and a friend.

For about four months now, I've been dating another woman. She seems like she's falling in love with me. I avoid that word "love." I don't want to say that word out loud because it comes loaded with promises that are fragile and easily broken. My question is, when do I have to take that big step and say, "I love you"? And, what is this love thing all about, anyway?

Signed,  
Confused

**SUGAR.** Dear Confused...

I agree, that word "love" is highly loaded with – Ah, I agree with you, well that's helpful advice –

Dear Confused...

You certainly must be confused if you're confused – Oh, that's good writing, I will just repeat your word back to you.

Please don't let the timetable by which others live their lives affect yours. No...

Dear Confused,

The last word my mother ever said to me was love. She was forty-five, and so sick and weak she couldn't muster the "I" or the "you," but it didn't matter. That pure word has the power to stand on its own.

I was twenty-two and I wasn't with my mom when she died. No one was. She died alone in a hospital room and for many years it felt like my insides were frozen solid because of that. I ran it over and over in my mind, the choices I made that kept me from being beside my mother in her last hours, but thinking about it didn't do a thing. Thinking about it was a long dive into a bucket of shit that didn't have a bottom.

I would never be with my mother when she died. She would never be alive again. The last thing that happened between us would always be the last thing. There would be the way I got my coat and said, "I love you," and there would be the way she was silent until I was almost out the door and she called:

**LETTER WRITER #2.** *(As Sugar's mother.) Love.*

*(SUGAR sees LETTER WRITER #2 as her mother in the past.)*

**SUGAR.** And, there would be the way that she was still lying in that bed when I returned the next morning, but dead.

My mother's last word to me clanks inside me like an iron bell that someone beats at dinnertime:

**LETTER WRITER #2.** *(As Sugar's mother.) Love, love, love, love, love.*

**SUGAR.** I'll bet you think this has nothing to do with your question, but your question and my answer are about *love*.

Love is the feeling we have for people we care about and hold in high regard. It can be light as the hug we give a friend or heavy as the sacrifices we make for our children. It can be fleeting, everlasting, conditional, unconditional, stoked by sex, sullied by abuse, nourished by humor.

The point is, you get to define it, you get to describe the oh-wow-I-didn't-mean-to-fall-in-love-but-I-sorta-did love you appear to have for this woman. You've convinced yourself that withholding one small word from her will shield you from getting hurt.

You asked me, when do you have to take that big step and tell your girlfriend that you love her, and my answer is: when you think you love her.

Be brave. Brave enough to break your own heart. Tackle the motherfucking shit out of love. Look, we're all going to die. Hit the iron bell like it's dinnertime.

Signed,  
Sugar

## Sugar - SIDE 2

TINY BEAUTIFUL THINGS

41

### The Baby Bird

SUGAR. Dear WTF,

My father's father made me jack him off when I was three and four and five. I wasn't any good at it. My hands were too small and I couldn't get the rhythm right and I didn't understand what I was doing. I only knew I didn't want to do it. Knew that it made me feel miserable and anxious in a way so sickeningly particular that I can feel that same particular sickness rising this very moment in my throat. I hated having to rub my grandfather's cock, but there was nothing I could do. I *had* to do it. My grandfather babysat my sister and me a couple times a week and most of the days that I was trapped in his house with him he would pull his already-getting-hard penis out of his pants and say *come here* and that was that.

I moved far away from him when I was nearly six and soon after that my parents split up and my father left my life and I never saw my grandfather again. He died of black lung disease when he was sixty-six and I was fifteen. When I learned he died, I wasn't sad. I wasn't happy either. He was no one to me and yet he was always there, the force of him and what he'd made me do moving through me like a dark river. For years, I didn't say a word about it to anyone. I hoped silence would make it disappear. But it didn't.

So I railed against it, in search of the answer to what the fuck was up with my grandfather doing that to me. But I could never shake it. That particular fuck would not be shook. Asking what the fuck only brought it around. Around and around it went, my grandfather's cock in my hands, the memory of it so vivid, so *palpable*, so very much a part of me. It came to me during sex and not during sex. It came to me in flashes and it came to me in dreams. It came to me one day when I found a baby bird that had fallen from a nest.

I'd always heard that you're not supposed to pick up baby birds; that once you touch them their mama won't come back and get them, but it doesn't matter if that's true or not. I knew there was only one humane thing to do. I put the baby bird in a paper bag and smothered it with my hands.

Nothing that has died in my life has ever died easily and this bird was no exception. I could feel it through the paper bag, pulsing against my hand and rearing up, simultaneously flaccid and ferocious beneath its translucent sheen of skin, precisely as my grandfather's cock had been.

*There it was!* There it was again. The ghost of that old man's cock would always be in my hands. But I understood what I was doing this time. I understood that I had to press harder than I could bear. It *had* to die. Pressing harder was murder. It was mercy.

That's what the fuck it was. The fuck was mine.

And the fuck is yours too. That question does not apply to "everything every day." If it does, you're wasting your life. If it does, you are a lazy coward and you are not a lazy coward. Ask better questions. The fuck is your life. Answer it.

Yours,  
Sugar

# Letter Writer 1 - SIDE 1

TINY BEAUTIFUL THINGS

37

## Sexy Santa

**LETTER WRITER #1.** Dear Sugar,

Kind of crazy, but my girlfriend is seriously turned on by Santa Claus. The old dude, big belly, white beard, his power to find out if you're naughty or nice. The whole thing just gets her going. It's our first Christmas together. She told me about the fantasy when Santa started to pop up all over the place. She gets especially turned on when she sees an actual Santa, which starts her thinking about sitting in his lap and what could happen next. You get the picture.

So here's my question. My sister has two young sons. A few years ago, she bought a Santa suit and I've been dressing up in it and going over to her place to give my nephews a thrill on Christmas Eve.

Anyway...it occurred to me that if I keep the suit for a bit I can give my girlfriend a thrill too. Creepy? Good idea? Bad idea? What do you make of this plan?

Thanks.

Sexy Santa

**SUGAR.** Dear Sexy Santa...

Your giving spirit is genuinely what the holiday season is all about! I say, stuff that woman's stocking the way only Santa knows how.

Yours,

Sugar

# Letter Writer 1 - SIDE 2

52

TINY BEAUTIFUL THINGS

## The Obliterated Place

**LETTER WRITER #1.** Dear Sugar,

One.

It's taken me many weeks to compose this letter and even still, I can't do it right. The only way I can get it out is to make a list instead of write a letter.

Two.

I don't have a definite question for you. I'm a sad, angry man whose son died. I want him back. That's all I ask for and it's not a question.

Three.

Nearly four years ago, a drunk driver drove through a red light and hit my son at full speed. The dear boy I loved more than life itself was dead before the paramedics even got to him. He was twenty-two, my only child.

Four.

I'm a father while not being a father. Most days it feels like my grief is going to kill me, or maybe it already has. I'm a living dead dad.

Five.

Your column has helped me go on. I have faith in my version of God and I pray every day and the way I feel when I'm in my deepest prayer is the way I feel when I read your words.

Six.

I see a psychologist regularly and I'm not clinically depressed or on medication.

Seven.

Suicide has occurred to me but I can't do it because it would be a betrayal of my values and also of the values I instilled in my son.

Eight.

I have good friends and family who are supportive and even my ex-wife and I have become close friends again since our son's death.

Nine.

I have a good job and my health.

Ten.

I'm going on with things in a way that makes it appear like I'm adjusting to life without my son, but the fact is I'm living a private hell.

Eleven.

Sometimes the pain is so great I simply lie in my bed and wail.

Twelve.

I can't stop thinking about my son.

Thirteen.

I can't stop thinking about the things my son would be doing now if he were alive and also the things I did with him when he was young.

Fourteen.

I hate the man who killed my son. For his crime, he was incarcerated eighteen months, then released. He wrote me a letter of apology, but I barely scanned it, I ripped it into pieces and threw it in the garbage.

Fifteen.

I fear you will choose not to answer my letter because you haven't lost a child.

Sixteen.

I fear if you choose to answer my letter people will make critical comments about you, saying you don't have the right to speak to this matter because you have not lost a child.

Seventeen.

I pray you will never lose a child.

Eighteen.

I will understand if you choose not to answer my letter. Most people, kind as they are, don't know what to say to me so why should you?

Nineteen.



I'm writing to you because the way you've written about your grief over your mother dying so young has been meaningful to me.

Twenty.

What can you say to me?

Twenty-one.

How do I go on?

Twenty-two.

How do I become human again?

Signed,

Living Dead Dad

**SUGAR.** Dear Living Dead Dad,

One.

I don't know how you go on without your son. I only know that you do. And you have. And you will.

Two.

Your shattering letter is proof of that.

Three.

You don't need me to tell you how to be human again. You are there, in all of your humanity, shining unimpeachably before every person reading these words right now.

Four.

I am so sorry for your loss. *I am so sorry for your loss.*

Iamsorryforyourloss.

Five.

You could stitch together a quilt with all the times that that has been and will be said to you. You could make a river of consolation words. But they won't bring your son back. They won't keep that man from getting into his car and careening through that red light at the precise moment your son was in his path.

Six.

You'll never keep that man from getting into that car.

## Letter Writer 2 - SIDE 1

TINY BEAUTIFUL THINGS

17

### How You Get Unstuck

LETTER WRITER #2. Dear Sugar,

I got pregnant, and my boyfriend and me – we were excited to become parents.

When I was six-and-a-half months pregnant, I miscarried.

(SUGAR *turns to* LETTER WRITER #2.)

Since then, not a day has gone by when I haven't thought about who that child would have been. A girl. She had a name. Every day I wake up and think, "My daughter would be six months old," or, "My daughter would maybe have started crawling today." Sometimes, all I can think is the word *daughter*, *daughter* over and over and over.

I'm not sad or pissed off. I just don't care about anything. I'm numb. And I can't get past it. Most of the people in my life expect me to have moved on by now. One pointed out, "It was only a miscarriage." So I also feel guilty about being so stuck, grieving for a child that never was.

Then there is the reason I lost the baby. My doctor said it was because I was overweight. Part of me thinks the doctor was an asshole for saying that, but another part of me believes that this was my fault. Sometimes, I don't eat for days and then sometimes, I eat everything in sight and throw it all up. I spend hours at the gym, walking on the treadmill until I can't lift my legs.

The rational part of me understands that if I don't pull myself out of this, I'll do serious damage to myself. I know this, and yet I just don't care. I want to know how to care again.

Signed,  
Stuck

## Letter Writer 2 - SIDE 2

48

TINY BEAUTIFUL THINGS

### The Bad Things You Did

**LETTER WRITER #2.** Dear Sugar,

For many years I stole compulsively. I blame myself, even though I was on a "cocktail" of psychotropic drugs for depression, anxiety and insomnia. I stole a pair of jeans from a friend, flower pots from a neighbor, money from a girlfriend's wallet. I blame myself even though I grew up with my abusive mother screaming at me that I was a liar, a cheat, and a thief. I was not only trying to fulfill my mother's prophecy, but maybe trying to get people to hate and reject me for being a liar, a cheat and a thief.

I hate myself, loathe myself for what I've done. I wonder if I should confess to the friends who will surely reject me. Sugar, can I forgive myself without admitting to people how I wronged them? Please help.

Signed,  
Thief

**SUGAR.** Dear Thief,

On a warm spring day several years ago, I saw I was down to my last twenty cents. So I put nearly everything I owned out on a lawn - my thrift store dresses, my knick-knacks and dishes.

*(SUGAR addresses the audience.)*

Customers came and went throughout the day, but my primary companions were a group of eleven-year-old boys who flitted about, inquiring how much this and that cost, even though they didn't have the money to purchase.

Late in the day, they told me one of the boys had stolen something from me - an empty retro leather camera case that I'd once used as a purse. It was a small thing, a barely-worth-bothering-about item that would've sold for only a couple of bucks, but still, I asked the accused boy if he'd taken it.

# Letter Writer 3 - SIDE 1

TINY BEAUTIFUL THINGS

29

## On Your Island

**LETTER WRITER #3.** Dear Sugar,

I'm thirty-four years old and I'm transgender.

(*SUGAR turns to LETTER WRITER #3.*)

I was born a female but I knew I was meant to be male for as long as I can remember. I had the usual painful childhood and adolescence in a smallish town because I was different – picked on by other kids, misunderstood by my family.

Seven years ago I told my mom and dad I intended to have sex reassignment surgery.\* They were furious. They said the worst things you can imagine anyone saying to another human being, especially if that human being is your child. In response, I cut off ties with them, moved away and made a new life living as a man. I have friends and romance in my life. I love my job. I'm happy with who I've become and the life I've made.

After years of no contact, I got an email from my parents that blew my mind. They apologized. They were sorry they never understood and now they do. They said they miss me and they love me. Sugar, they want me back.

I cried like crazy and that surprised me. I believed I didn't love my parents anymore.

I have made it without them. I've created an island far away and safe from my past. I made it because I'm tough. Do I forgive them and get back in touch, or do I ignore their email and stay safe on my island? What do I do?

Signed,  
Orphan

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\*Licensees can replace "sex reassignment surgery" with "gender confirmation surgery" if they so choose. It is the author's hope that licensees will rehearse both options and choose whichever feels best.

## Letter Writer 3 - SIDE 3

TINY BEAUTIFUL THINGS

43

### The Empty Bowl

**LETTER WRITER #3.** Dear Sugar,

My father is a narcissist: controlling, vain, volatile, and charming. If I wasn't cheerful enough, I was locked in my room for days; if I made a joke he'd yell and curse at me. My father would denounce me as his child over slight disagreements. When he decided that everything was fine again, I was expected to accept his change of heart – no apologies offered (unless they were mine). I could never be perfect enough, and yet I tried so hard to make him proud, to make him care. He was my dad after all.

Still now, as an adult, it's not better. He is so consumed by his image that when he found out that my therapist – an understanding, kind, and sympathetic counselor – was a woman he knew, he insisted I stop seeing her.

But three months ago he went too far. He betrayed my mother, and I was a fucking bitch for finding out about his infidelity.

People insist that family is important, that it is my duty to forgive the man that gave me life and to keep him in my life. He's the only father that I have. But is it worth the pain?

Signed,

When is too much too much?

**SUGAR.** Dear Too Much,

No, maintaining a relationship with your abusive father is not worth it. Yes, he is the only father you will ever have, but that does not give him the right to abuse you. The standard you should apply in deciding whether or not to have an active relationship with him is the same one you should apply to all the relationships in your life: you will not be mistreated or disrespected or manipulated.

Your father does not currently meet that standard.

My mother left my father because he'd been violent and abusive. I haven't had parents as an adult, and